THE WIND-BLOWN LANGUAGE PAPIAMENTO **BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL ARUBA**

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Arubiana: 171

Reprinted from HISPANIA February 1945

THE WIND-BLOWN LANGUAGE: PAPIAMENTO

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Den mar Caribe

Di brisa fuerte Tin un islita Cu yam' Arubo— "In the Caribbean Sea,

Wind-swept,
Is a tiny isle
Called Aruba—"

CO BEGINS the Papiamento song A"uba Dushi, which chants the charms of "Sweet Aruba," one of the three little Caribbean islands just north of Venezuela forming the Territory of Curação: Aruba, Bonaire, and Curação, Di brisa fuerte affirms that they are right in the path of the trade winds. The trades blow here all year round with a mean velocity of about 15 m.p.h., and always from the same direction-northeast. Indigenous to these islands is the divi-divi tree (Caesalpinia coriaria), a short tree with small green leaves that in other, less breezy stations of its habitat must take on the normally haphazard appearance forced on trees by heliotropism. But in these islands, the constant push of the trade winds has blown all the little divi-divis into the same tortured pattern: they look like women, bent over from the waist, with their long hair horizontal in the wind. The steady, relentless trades, by their untiring, century-old strain, have standardized, swept clean of all wayward branches, made almost identical one with another, these divi-divis that otherwise would have been as individual, as non-conforming as, well let us say-one Spanish irregular verb and another.

On July 26, 1499, the Spanish navigator, Alonso Ojeda, accompanied by Amerigo Vespucci, entered the bottle-neck harbor of Curaçao. In 1502 Ojeda came back to the island as Governor, and so began the history of Papiamento: a language molded, beaten, whipped, hammered, blown into simple, ultra-modern form by no less than forty-five nationalities during the course of four centuries. As the persistent northeast trades have blown all the wayward branches of the dividities into a regular, southwesterly direction, so have the no less persistent efforts of the forty-five nationalities toward a lingua franca, a common meeting ground of communication, blown Carib and Arawak Indian, African Negro, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French into the unbelievably regular Papiamento. A

language without the benefit, or drag, of textbooks. No stuffy arguments by fussy grammarians. The stilted, binding influence of no archael literature. Forty-five nationalities laughed, cried, talked, joked, fought, haggled, loved, hated, literal with each other for four hundred years. The result: Papiamento.

Constructions too complex for a Portuguese Jew to use with a Carib Indian—out. Pronunciations too awkward for a Spaniard to use with a Negro African slave—out. Words too formal for a Brazilian swain to use with his Chinese girl—out. Spellings too difficult for the Dutch governor to use in his ax-law declarations for the children of a Hindu mother and a Prench father—out. Into the molten language went the latest slang from the rebel English Colonies; the salitiest works in the pirate vocabulary of the Spanish Main; the most picturesque intonations from slaves newly arrived from the African jungles.

Seldom written, never taught in schools, but handed down from mouth to mouth through the generations, what has lasted is the wheat without the useless chaff. Papiamento (the word itself means "speaking") is pithy, concise, quintessential, utilitarian, unencumbered with trifling adornments; in a word: streamlined.

The strategic position of Curaçao in the Caribbean, its excellent harbor, and the salt-licks of adjacent Bonaire have made its two hundred and ten sea-fringed square miles a tempting bait attracting the colonial forces of Spain, France, England, Holland, and free-lance revolutionists ever since the fifteen-hundreds. Its extensive sea trade lurred three-masted birds of prey flying the Jolly Roger; little Aruba still whispers of pirate caves and of sunken treasure in the waters of Balashi.

The hundred and hirty-two years of Spanish rule between 1502 and 1634 gave Papiamento its Castilian base, which accounts for about sixty per cent of the language; but it got a powerful impetus with the arrival of Samuel Coheño in 1634. In that year the Spaniards retired from the Territory in favor of the Dutch. Coheño, originally a Portuguese Jew, came from Holland to serve as interpreter between the Dutch, Spaniards, and native Indians. The fact that in 1634 he was named "Captain of the Indians" indicates that he must have had immediate success in bringing these diverse peoples together with some sort of language melange.

Peter Stuyvesant, Governor of Cureçao in 1643, made the island the flourishing center of the African slave trade. Through the intercession of commercial houses in Madrid, slaves were imported from the Gold Coasel, the Congo, Loango, and Angola. To Stuyvesant goes the maldocrous credit of having started Cureçao on its two-hundred-year career of being the principal purveyor of slaves for the Spanish colonies. Peter Stuyvesant fet behind in Curraçao his right leg and a pungent jungfe flavor in Paplas-

mento. The West India Company licensed the influx into Curação of groups, mostly Portuguese, fleeing from racial and religious persecution. Attempted invasions by the French, and the English rule from 1804 to 1816, provided more piquant seasoning for the simmering language.

From down deep in the holds of the slave ships bringing their cargoes of misery from the Congo to the Curazoleño market, comes one of the Papiamento nouns: macamba. It has been reported as derived from an African dialect where it meant "white man." Behind the word macamba burk the fithly, 125-foot sailing ships carrying hundreds of black, tortured souls; the dysentery, the scurvy, the fever, the pleurisy that almost halved the human cargoes before the basts sailed into St. Annabaai. Survivors of these foul voyages were, upon landing, further subjected to hot-iron branding on their chests or arms. The inhuman treatment the poor blacks suffered is still part of the sad connotation of macamba. It is now simply the Papiamento term for Dutchman, but something distasteful lingers with the pronouncing of the word.

Papiamento verbs are a delight to the grammar-weary. Tradesmen and pirates, slave-traders and sailors have business to transact and, generally speaking, care precious little whether the e changes to i or the third-person-singular takes an so long as the other fellow knows what you are talking about. Papiamento has the present, imperfect, future, and perfect tenses; the active and passive voices; the indicative, potential, and subjunctive modes. All regular! What makes conjugation in Papiamento as rippling as a mountain stream is that three of the four tenses are patterned on the verb to, "to be." Learn to, and you have three-quarters of the inflected forms of all the other verbs (see accompanying chart).

Words in Papiamento derived from Spanish are stripped of their embellishments and reduced to stark utility. For example, the Spanish verb caber, a nightmare disturbing the repose of Spanish students, is cabe in Papiamento and goes through its tenses as just caba, bliasfully unaware of all the tortuous inflections of its castellang cognate. Significar and observes are demoded to nifica and scur.

Rules are unnecessary when all nouns form their plurals in exactly the same way. Add the third-person-plural pronoun, non, to a noun, any noun, all nouns! and you get the plural. In the last few years Papiamento has acquired such staunch North American substantives as bus and truck. In Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao they speak of two busnon, and more than one truck is referred to as trucknone.

In a similar fashion, words and phrases from other languages have been assimilated, down through the decades, into Papiamento. It is rather curious that names of practically all instruments and working tools—hermentnes—are of Dutch origin, while expressions applying to social life.

MODEL PAPIAMENTO CONJUGATIONS

THE VERB TA (BE)

INDICATIVE MODE

Present Tense

THE VERB STIMA (LOVE)

				Active			Passive		
Mi) Bo	ta	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	ta stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	ta worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	
			Imperfect Tense						
Mi Bo E	tabata	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	tabata stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	tabata worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	
			Future Tense						
Mi Bo E	lo ta	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	lo stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	lo worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	
			Perfect Tense						
	The verb to lacks this tense.			a stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	a worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	
			POTENTIAL MODE Present Tense						
Mi) Bo} E]	por ta	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	por stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	por worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	
			Future Tense						
Mi) Bo E	lo por ta	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	lo por stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi) Bo) E	lo por worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	
			Past-Time						
Mi Bo E	por tabata	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	por a stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	por a worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	

religion, and etiquette have a Latin background and character: soag (saw), scruf (screw), trekter (funnel), potlood (pencil), lessenoor (desk), verf (paint), sker (scissors), bril (spectacles). But a typical advertisement in

SUBJUNCTIVE MODE

The Subjunctive Mode, for the most part, duplicates the Indicative except in the past-time tenses, which are blended as in the Potential Mode:

Past-Time

		Nos Boso Nan	Active			Passive		
Mi Bo E	lo tabata		Mi Bo E lo a stima	Nos Boso Nan	Mi Bo E	lo a worde stima	Nos Boso Nan	
	Imperative: Sea		Imperative: Stima					
	To has no participles.		Participles: Present: stimando		Past: stima			

Any other verb stem (e.g., odmiro admire or be surprised at, combini agree, cuthèse cook, parti divide, guis guide, hari laugh, sinja learn or teach, salbe save) can be put through the above inflections with hardly an exception.

the weekly newspaper, La Crus, would read: Pa medio di es lineaman aki nos hier expresa nos sincera gratitud na ture amigo-i conocirmon bu di un of otro manera a muntra nos san adencion na ocasion di morto di nos inolvidoble casa, tata, ruman i omigo, Adolfo Tromp (Q.E.P.D.) Na. nomber di e famici B. V. Tromp.

"By means of these lines, we want to express our sincere gratitude to all friends and acquaintances who, in one way or another, showed us their attention on the occasion of the death of our unforgettable husband, father, brother, and friend, Adolfo Tromp (may he rest in peace). In the name of the family: B. V. Tromp."

That announcement is not Papiamento, It is a stilled form affected for public notices, invitations, and the like, It demonstrates clearly that, while the Dutch derivations are for the homely, everyday matters, a sprinkling of Spanish lends elegance and finesse.

Genders go by the board in Papiamento. The definite article is e; the indefinite article is un; both may precede any noun. E homber, e muker, e pollood. The man, the woman, the pencil. Un muchahomber, un muchamuher, un scool. A bov. a girl. a school.

In Spanish 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 are dies, once, doce, trece, catorce, quince; 16, 17, 18, 19 are dieciskis, diecistete, dieciocho, diecimero. Papiamento has recognized this inconsistency by counting dies, diesum, diesdos, diestres, diescustro, diescinco, and then on into diesesis, etc.

Syntax is refreshingly simple. Subject, predicate—in that order—and that's all. Interrogatory sentence: use a question-mark and raise the pitch in your voice. E tin idea di bai Korson. "He is thinking of going to

Curação." E tin idea di bai Korsou? "Is he thinking of going to Curação?" The polite form of European tongues has its simplified counterpart in Papiamento. The name of the person addressed is used rather than the

personal pronoun. Bo ta gusta mi sombré? "Do you like my hat?" is the intimate form. Sr. Croes ta gusta mi sombré? "Do you like my hat, Mr. Croes?" is the polite form.

Papiamento pronunciation has been worn down to a mirror smoothness. The Spanish mujer is muher in Papiamento. The aspirated h gives you almost the same effect as j, but with much less effort. The ll (elle) of Castilian is eroded down to y. Spanish v's are b's. The word llove (key) in Papiamento is yabi. Try pronouncing the two and see if yabi isn't llave after a greasing job.

The idiom is kept up-to-date. A droll wise-crack, a delicious bon motif it introduces a snappy new word or the new use of an old world-soon becomes a permanent fixture. About ten years ago, an Aruban with a gouty foot entered the dispensary of the newly-established oil company on that island. "Better stay away from cheap rum," joked the doctor. The story spread, and ever since the Papiamento word for cheap rum has been hinchapia, "swollen foot." E ta toca piano bon ("He plays the piano well") is standard for a nimble-fingered kleptomaniac. The stale maxim, Anochi tur pushi ta pretu ("At night all cats are black"), met the tempo of the times by being altered to Den e blackout tur pushi ta pretu.

Surely, no poetry in any language was ever more fervidly instant than this song that rose from the exultant throats of 7,989 slaves of the Territory of Curação, emancipated July 1, 1863:

Rumannan I Gradici cu nos

Pa Cielo su bondad. Bam canta awor cu tur nos bos Biba La Libertad! Awe pa boluntad di Rei I bos di nos nacion, Igual nos ta dilanti lei I liber di tur thon "Brothers I Give thanks with us For Heaven's grace. Come and sing now with might and main Long live Liberty ! Today, by the will of the King And decree of our country

And freed of all masters." There is no wealth of literature in Papiamento. It is not possible to quote long passages, the immortal heritage of a national genius. But a

We are equal before the law

storehouse of philosophy and human understanding has been compressed into their proverbs. A few words take the place of libraries. Thought, human perception, compensation for great books are in the Papiamento proverbionon. Volumes are contained in simple sentences bandied across the family dinner-table, in the reprimands given by mothers to their wayward young 'uns.

Mrs. Croes, for instance, chatting with Mrs. Oduber over the cactus fence separating their respective back yards, might demonstrate an undue interest in the private affairs of Mrs. Oduber's household. Mrs. Oduber, who is an isolationist and "likes for people to mind strictly to their own business," might say, Panja rushi mester to laba na cax. "Dirty clothes must be washed at home." That expression would not have been coined by Mrs. Oduber. It is generations old and is succinct for reminding people that a family seleton must be kept in its close.

Children sometimes are a nuisance, but what are you to do? No isw was pa stoba yiu malusu. "There isn't a pot to stew bad children in." Children can't be cooked, used in any way; you've just got to suffer them. Speaking of family woes, Piewu di bo mes cabes ta pica mas duro. "Lice on your own head bite harder." When trouble hits one's own flesh-and-blood, one feels it more kenly than when it strikes next door.

Can't you see a shy Aruban boy of eighteen who has been casting bashfull glances at pretty little Maximian Dirksz—can't you hear his father telling him, Amor scondi to tempo perdi, "Undeclared love is time lost." Puppy love: Amor di mucho to anou dem macculu. "Teen-age love is water in an open-work basiet." Cooperation: Un man to labo otro; tur dos to bira limph. "One hand washes the other; both get clean." Tiring exhibitionists who love to bewall and bemoon their sad histories in public are told, Lorga morto no tandano, bin yora na cas. "Leave the corpse at the cemetery; go home to cry."

The age-old truths brought home by our English adages acquire new facets when ground by Papiamento outers. "A new broom sweeps clean" gets its direct antithesis with Un batora bieuw conoce tur huki den cas. "An old broom knows all the corners in the house." "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" surely can't have an opposing voice. But to a people for whom fresh water is a luxury (it is sold at so-much a can), it must certainly be a comfort at times to repeat, Curpa sushi no ta mata. "A dirty body doesn't kill." "Chickens come home to roots" has its Caribbean version, Giombo bieuw a bolbe na wea. "Old okra comes back to the pot." Like father, like sons: "Penpunsus on sa pari calba." "The pumpkin plant doesn't bear calabashes." Wells in these islands are generally level with the surface of the ground with no superstructure. Ora bise a hoge, son to demple a bos. "After the calf is drowned, they cover the well." "After the horse is

stolen, the stable door is locked." Many an American child has answered his disciplining parent's classical "This hurts me more than it does you," with an unspoken "Oh yeah." Papianento gets down to undisguised brass tacks with, Mehor un yie yora cu su mama yora. "Better the child cry than his mother."

This next proverb brings to mind the newspaper story of the Nazi pupper who had been conducting a fierce anti-Semitic campaign in a Balkan country. Somehow or other it finally came to light that this official himself had had a Hebruse grandmother. He retired ignominiously from public life. No scupi na cielo, $pa \in no$ caiden bo mes cora. "Don't spit upwards, for it will fall back in your own face."

Lizards are a problem in the Territory. They eat produce as fast as it grows. Fences between fields offer an excellent means of transportation for the pests. Si bo no kire tin gera cu lagadishi, no plants boomhi eerca e transkera. "If you don't want war with the lizards, don't plant beans near the elnee." Be a bit circumspect if you're not after trouble. "Don't lead with your chin!" The monkey is a favorite foil of Papiamento proverbs. Actually, monkey are not found locally, but somehow macacus is an epithet that appeals when describing a fool. At the child who has broken a newly-received toy by excessive handling, the Papiamento parent shakes a reprimanding finger: Macacus in Ausaga cus womo di sus yute teora exacte. "A monkey plays with its baby's eye until the eye falls out." That experience is the best teacher, even for the simpleton, is exemplified by Um macacus to subside jobus dissumpinja un biohe so. "A monkey climbs a cactus tree only once."

Its dry, unbountiful climate makes the Territory of Curação barrea and unfruitful. Instead of the lund growth expected of the tropies, in "good" years (average yearly rainfall: 16:29 inches) there are a few beans, akimpy maize, tiny watermelons, and an occasional cashew fruit. In bad years (not infrequently, the annual rainfall is but eight to twelve inches) there are the cacti and the sea-grapes. Keeping body and soul together on maize boiled in brackish well-water (funch) has made the inhabitants philosophical in the face of arid adversity. Si e no yobe, lo pings. "If it is doceant 'ani, it will at least drizzie."—"It's a long lane that has no turning."

There are scores of other Papiamento proverbs illustrating the patience inculcated by the geographical Mother Hubbard whose cupboard is only too often bare: Ora no tin pan, metter come casaba. "When there isn't bread, one must eat casava." The rigors of wrathful waters have elicited a similar sentiment from seafaring English peoples, "Any old port in a

On This is of course a translation of a Spanish proverb—used in Don Quijote—and others common in Papiamento doubtless have a Spanish source. Eprron.

storm." Observing a fowl enjoying a dust-bath has helped many a necessarily ascetic citizen of the Territory put up with his own meagre lot. Gallinja ta banja cu e awa cu e tin. "A chicken bathes with the sort of water she has at hand."

To the wastrel who forgets that Nature is inexorable, that seeds not planted when a few drops of rain fall can rarely be sown later, that only poor substitutes can be found for bounties once let slip, the wrinkled old Aruban lady with the black shawl over her head would say, Esun cu to perde sonjo na cabes, ta busk'e na pia. "He who loses sleep in his head must seek it in his feet." A foot asleep is a sad compensation for a night's rest, she means. The man who squanders a substantial legacy may later have to seek a hand-to-mouth existence selling lottery tickets in the street.

The weary mother says to the child fretting under the monotonous diet of fish, salt meat, and boiled maize, Cacho nenga wesu, ta wesu mes e mester come. "A dog turns down a bone; it's that very bone he must eat." The exigencies of life make it unwise to turn up one's nose at any bit of sustenance; stern necessity will make it mighty welcome later on. Enforced submission to the hardships inflicted by dour environment and circumstances has been epitomized with, Ora bo ta bao e palu, mester wanta cu sushi di para. "When you're under a tree, you must put up with birddroppings."

The Territory's scanty flora and fauna have made local people unmercifully dependent on the outside world. Wars, piracy, and sea blockades have continually shut off supplies, forcing them back on their own poor, inadequate resources. The privations necessarily brought on by warfare to any people have, therefore, been felt more keenly by them, isolated as they are. When submarines in the Second World War cut off the accustomed provisions from the States and Europe, Curazoleños shrugged their shoulders, did without, and said what many generations of their ancestors have said over and over again in the course of Curação's turbulent pastin 1804, for instance, during the siege of the island by the English Commander Bligh-or in 1713, for another instance, during the invasion of the French under de Cassart-Tempo di gera no tin misa. "In time of war, there isn't any religion." In wartime, luxuries are not to be had.

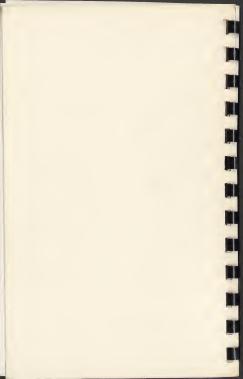
Volapük, Esperanto, Ido and at least eight other artificial tongues have been fostered as international languages for their (1) easy phonetics, (2) simple grammar, (3) facility of translation and interpretation, and (4) Occidental vocabulary base. Papiamento has all four attributes, and what is more it has what no manufactured language can ever boast: a spontaneous, up-from-the-people naturalness. Like the trade winds on the divi-divis, the succeeding, heterogeneous generations have gradually worn away all egregious, unnatural Papiamentoisms. All the capricious, forward little language upshoots that couldn't stand the year-by-year, hammering blast of pirates, slaves, Conquistadores, Indians, and traveling salesmen were soon blown off the parent tree. Trying to be affected in Papiamento is like walking down the Bowery in a morning coat and top hat—in either case, you won't get very far.

That Papiamento has in it truly cosmopolitan elements may be demonstrated by this incident. Several years ago, the writer, who knew neither Spanish nor Portuguese, boarded the night train at São Paulo, Brazil, bound for Rio de Janeiro. The intimacy of a tiny compartment shared with a non-English-speaking Brazilian is still painful. From 9 pm. to 6 am. the conversationless silence was haunting. Wakened from a cat-nap at dawn by the sudden lurching of the train, I inadvertently asked, in Papiamento, of my fellow-traveler, "Nos a yegot". In purest Papiamento he responded, "Ainda no!" That it was Portuguese, too, didn't faze me. We had material with which to brask that nine-hour silence! We chatted through breakfast in the dining car, and he saw me to my destination in Rio. Still recalling his beaming, moustached face bidding me "Te roto best" from the rear window of a taxi starting down the Avenida President Wilson, the next year I boldly used Papiamento for Spanish in lofty! Bogotá, Colombia. Diesters for trece was humiliating but understandable.

For three hundred years Dutch has been the official language in the Territory of Curaçao. Dutch is used in the schools, right from the first grades. In an Aruban scholorom, for example, may be found Aruban, Hindu, English Negro, Chinese, and Venezuelan children. In school they speak and write a fair Dutch, but once beyond the precincts of learning, they chatter and play in an effervescent Papiamento. Government clerks may use Dutch all day long while at the office, but at home with their families their medium is Papiamento. Even after three centuries of official fundies they continue the proposed proposed to the proposed programments of the proposed pr

There is an expression to indicate contempt for anything showy that contains, in proportion to its glittering promise, a disappointing amount of tangible substance: Hopi scuma, poco chocolati. "A lot of foam, but little chocolate."







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